

168      SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND  
REFORMER

Bete Humaine," was that he wished to diversify his series as much as possible; but it is also certain that he often found it necessary to husband his energies, to allow himself breathing time, as it were, between two great efforts.

He spent some months at L'Estaque writing "Une Page d'Amour," and on returning to Paris late in the autumn of 1877, enriched as he was by the sales of "L'Assommoir," he removed his home to a handsome third-floor flat, 23, Rue de Boulogne. Then, while searching the environs of Paris for a country *picd-h-terre*, a convenient retreat for the following summer — when the first great Exhibition since the Franco-German War was to be held in Paris — he came upon a little house which took his fancy. It stood on the verge of the village of Me\*dan, which overlooks the Seine, beyond Poissy. Zola merely wished to rent it, but the owner desired a purchaser, not a tenant, and in the end the novelist bought the little place for nine thousand francs.<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later, says Alexis, builders, painters, and upholsterers were turned into the house to repair and fit it for occupation, and for several years they remained busy there on the various enlargements which followed and the other work which became necessary.

Already in 1876, having acquired by his

contributions to  
" Le Bien Public" what may be at least called a  
conspicuous  
position as a dramatic critic of very absolute  
views, Zola,  
still hankering for theatrical success, had  
written a farce  
called " Le Bouton de Rose " intended for the  
Palais Royal  
Theatre. At the beginning of 1877 the parts  
were distributed  
and some rehearsals even took place;  
then, however,  
the success of the work seeming doubtful, it  
was postponed;

<sup>1</sup> £860 = about \$1,800.